Care and Commitment (PHGA 6165)

Fall 2003
Thursdays: 2 - 4 PM

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Office Hours: At RH: Thursday following class (4-5 PM).

Main Themes. This course is about the closely related concepts of character, virtue, projects or sustained commitment, and moral agency. It concerns questions such as:

- How do we develop a sense of our own identity, or shape a coherent sense of what matters to us?
- Can we decide what is worth caring about, what gives life meaning for us, or do our society and cultures decide this for us?
- How do we form life-goals and plans, stick to them, or revise them?
- What qualities of character does lasting commitment to our projects require, and how do we shape our character in the process?
- Where is the borderline between authentic resolve, devotion or commitment and destructive fanaticism?
- What kinds of freedom or openness to alternatives does human agency involve in shaping an individual life-narrative, and what moral ideals or norms govern this process?

We will consider at historical and contemporary accounts of moral character and the role of commitment to causes, persons, and social roles in shaping meaningful human lives. In addition to recent philosophical literature, some of our readings will also consider psychological and feminist approaches to the concepts of personality, character, agency, and caring. Our readings will be drawn from some of the following contemporary topics and authors:

Jeffrey Blustein, Care and Commitment (Oxford University Press, 1991).

Other Articles: I will make these available in a stack in the lounge, and on reserve in Walsh, for each student to copy.
Grading System
Class participation: 15% Attendance, preparation, contribution to discussions.
Three short response papers 30% These 2-3 page papers will be responses to readings in the first half of the semester, chosen from a short list of options.
Introducing one reading: 10% Each student will open di